

Message Text

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INR-05 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02

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R 181950Z DEC 74

FM AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9009

INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

C O N F I D E N T I A L WELLINGTON 3889

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MNUC, NZ

SUBJECT: LEADER OF OPPOSITION FAVORS NUCLEAR-POWERED WARSHIP VISITS

TO NEW ZEALAND

REF: A-8532, NOV. 13, 1974

BEGIN SUMMARY: LEADER OF OPPOSITION ROBERT MULDOON HAS TOLD EMBASSY THAT HE FAVORS RESUMPTION OF VISITS TO NEW ZEALAND BY AMERICAN NUCLEAR-POWERED WARSHIPS AND WILL WORK TO PERSUADE HIS CABINET TO AGREE IF NATIONAL PARTY WINS GENERAL ELECTION IN NOVEMBER 1975. END SUMMARY.

1. DURING SMALL DINNER PARTY WITH EMBASSY OFFICERS ON DECEMBER 17, LEADER OF OPPOSITION ROBERT MULDOON WAS ASKED HIS VIEWS ON RESUMPTION OF VISITS TO NEW ZEALAND BY AMERICAN NUCLEAR-POWERED WARSHIPS (NPW). THE INABILITY OF OUR NPW'S TO VISIT NEW ZEALAND MADE LIFE MORE DIFFICULT FOR OUR NAVY MEN AND SEEMED INCONSISTENT WITH THE FACT THAT THE UNITED STATES AND NEW ZEALAND WERE LINKED TOGETHER IN SECURITY. THE PROBLEM OF COMPENSATION FOR DAMAGES THAT MIGHT RESULT FROM NPW VISITS MIGHT SOON BE TAKEN CARE OF BY ACTION IN THE US CONGRESS.

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2. MULDOON REPLIED THAT THE REAL OPPOSITION TO NPW VISITS

TO NEW ZEALAND DID NOT STEM FROM THE PROBLEM OF COMPENSATION. THE QUESTION WAS BASICALLY POLITICAL, IMPLYING THAT THE OUTLOOK OF LABOUR PARTY LEFT WINGERS WAS OPPOSED TO ANY AND EVERYTHING NUCLEAR. BUT MULDOON HIMSELF CONSIDERED IT RIDICULOUS FOR AMERICAN NPW'S NOT TO BE ALLOWED ACCESS TO NEW ZEALAND. HE RECALLED PAST VISITS OF SUCH SHIPS, HOW WELL THESE HAD COME OFF, AND THE FRIENDLY RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN NEW ZEALANDERS AND AMERICANS THAT HAD DEVELOPED FROM THEM. AS FAR AS MULDOON WAS CONCERNED, THE ALLEGED DANGER FROM NPW VISITS WAS A PHONY ISSUE. AFTER ALL, THE AMERICANS HAD THOUSANDS OF THEIR OWN SAILORS ABOARD THESE SHIPS. IF THERE HAD BEEN ANY REAL DANGER, THE AMERICAN PUBLIC WOULD HAVE DISCOVERED IT BEFORE NOW. ACCORDINGLY, IF HE WINS THE GENERAL ELECTIONS NEXT NOVEMBER, AS HE CONFIDENTLY EXPECTS TO DO (SEE SEPTEL), MULDOON WILL WORK TO LIFT THE BAN ON NPW VISITS. HE PERSONALLY FAVORS THIS AND WILL LOBBY WITH HIS CABINET FOR ITS APPROVAL.

3. MULDOON DOES NOT EXPECT NPW VISITS TO NEW ZEALAND TO BE A CAMPAIGN ISSUE IN THE NEXT ELECTIONS. HE DOES NOT EXPECT PRIME MINISTER ROWLING TO RAISE THE ISSUE AND HE WILL NOT RAISE IT HIMSELF. HE SEES LITTLE REALISTIC CHANCE THAT THE PRESENT LABOUR GOVERNMENT WILL CHANGE ITS OPPOSITION TO NPW VISITS, WHETHER OR NOT THERE IS A NEW AMERICAN COMPENSATION LAW.

5. COMMENT. WE CONSIDER MULDOON'S STAND TO BE AN ENCOURAGING FORWARD STEP, FOR HE HAS A REPUTATION FOR DOING WHAT HE PROMISES TO DO. SO IF THE NATIONAL PARTY WINS THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTIONS--AND INTERNAL ECONOMIC STRAINS IN NEW ZEALAND SEEM DEFINITELY TO BE IMPROVING ITS CHANCES--OUR NPW VESSELS MAY BE ABLE TO RESUME VISITS TO NEW ZEALAND AT THE END OF NEXT YEAR.

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